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HONOUR KILLING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAKESPEARE'S THE WINTER'S TALE AND THE PAKISTANI WINTER'S TALE

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Abstract

This paper explores how the theme of honour/dishonour in The Winter's Tale by William Shakespeare is recontextualised in its Pakistani adaptation, Fasana-e-Ajaib, with special focus on the honour-killing ethos in the socio-cultural context of modern-day Pakistan. Applying Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation (2006) as a theoretical lens and Catherine Belsey's model (2013) for textual analysis, the current study employs a qualitative-interpretive research approach and close reading techniques to explore the ideological differences and narrative transformations between the source text and its adaptation. This study examines how a patriarchal concept like honour in the original play is reinterpreted in violent form in the cultural context of 21st-century Pakistan, revealing the deep-rooted socio-cultural realities of gender-based violence in the country. The analysis highlights that Fasana-e-Ajaib indigenises Shakespeare's universal themes by reinterpreting them within the particular cultural discourse of honour, dishonour, shame, and violence in present-day Pakistan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Faqir (2001) defines honour killing as "... the killing of women for suspected deviation from sexual norms imposed by society" (p. 66). Honour killings, according to Meetoo and Mirza (2010), are extreme forms of violence generally inflicted upon a woman when a code of honour is considered to have been violated and perceived as dishonour and shame is brought upon the family. They further argue that honour killing is carried out not only by a husband but also by other family members like a father, brother, uncle, or even a mother. Honour-related violence, particularly honour killing, is one of the disturbing reflections of patriarchal structures in various countries, including Pakistan. The UN estimates that every year, approximately 5000 women are killed for the sake of honour (UNFPA, 2000). More than 100 women are killed by their spouses in England and Wales each year. In 2003, according to the Metropolitan Police, 12 honour killing cases were reported in the Muslim, Christian, and Sikh communities (Gupta, 2003).

Honour killing, usually viewed through a sociological or legal lens, also finds its way into socio-cultural texts like novels, plays, and films, which highlight these entrenched social norms. This study examines how

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such a theme is reflected and transformed in literature, particularly through the adaptation of The Winter's Tale, into the cultural setting of contemporary Pakistan in the form of Fasana-e-Ajaib.

The Winter's Tale, written by William Shakespeare around 1610-1611, is generally categorised as a 'problem play'. The first half of the story revolves around King Leontes' pathological obsession with honour, specifically concerning the loyalty and chastity of his wife, Queen Hermione. While no honour killing takes place in the play and ends on a happy note, the first half of the plot enacts emotional, physical, and symbolic violence, especially toward female characters, and highlights masculine supremacy and the gendered power dynamic (Ramzan & Javaid, 2025).

In contrast, Gregory Thompson's Fasana-e-Ajaib (2014), a Pakistani version of The Winter's Tale, adapted in NAPA (National Academy of Performing Arts) Karachi in collaboration with the British Council, recontextualises the central themes through a culturally specific perspective, where the symbolic idea of honour has not only been preserved but reinterpreted into a literal and more fatal consequence for the female gender. In Pakistan, as Iqbal (2005) asserts, honour is associated with women's sexuality and seen as a manifestation of patriarchal mindsets. In Pakistan, honour killing is considered a culturally defended practice, where the community legitimises and sanctions this practice within its socio-cultural sphere. He further adds that property savings, choosing a life partner, or rejecting a marriage proposal, a spouse's will for more marriages, and alleged acts of illicit or romantic relationships are usually common factors behind honour killing in the country. Most of the time, honour killings are committed on false accusations or mere suspicions instead of solid evidence (Iqbal, 2005). In Pakistan, honour is closely associated with women's behaviour, and perceived violations can lead to lethal consequences like honour killings, where men kill women relatives for allegedly bringing about shame and dishonour upon the family (Hadi, 2019, p. 115).

By the application of Adaptation Theory, this study argues that Fasana-e-Ajaib does more than retell or rework Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale. It indigenises the source text's preoccupations with patriarchal structures and recontextualises them within Pakistani culture, where honour is not merely symbolic but a real and violent social norm.

Research Question

How does Fasana-e-Ajaib, as a Pakistani adaptation of The Winter's Tale, recontextualise the theme of honour to highlight culturally specific notions of violence against women?

2. Literature Review

Various research works have been conducted on the theme of honour in Shakespearean plays. Scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt (2004) and Carol Thomas Neely (1977) have analysed the convergence of jealousy, power, and masculine control. King Leontes' baseless and irrational suspicion is generally viewed as emblematic of patriarchal anxiety over women's autonomy and sexuality. Scholars like Coppelia Kahn (2013) have examined how the Queen's dignity and forbearance contrast with the King's authoritarian attitude, reflecting women's moral predominance in the face of patriarchal oppression. However, despite its critique, the source text conveys a sense of fantasy and wondrous rejuvenation, where past wrongs are forgiven and harmony is restored.

William Shakespeare is regarded as an icon of lasting cultural and literary influence in modern times (Joubin, 2017). According to Olsson (2013), his works have significantly impacted language, literature, and the modern world. His unique characterisation, nuanced plot, and skilful use of language make him a universally celebrated figure who is not limited to a particular time or space (Karamat & Khalis, 2023). Shakespeare transcends geographical as well as linguistic boundaries. As Kennedy (1993) asserts, he

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[Shakespeare] crosses national and linguistic boundaries effortlessly. Drakakis (1985) states, Shakespeare provides a comprehensive view of all that is essential for human life, from cradle to grave. The critic further contends that Shakespeare turns out to be our contemporary when his plays are recontextualised to our times.

According to Probst (1994), one reader may interpret a text differently from another reader, and both interpretations may be different from that of the author. Interpretation of a text is shaped by a reader's subjective experiences and socio-cultural realities. An article, Shakespeare in the Bush (1998) by Laura Bohannan, clearly highlights this concept by analysing the remarks given by a chieftain of an African tribe after hearing the story of Shakespeare's Hamlet from the author. She asserts that before narrating Hamlet's story to the tribesmen, the researcher thought it would be quite easy for her to tell it. She believed that the listeners would interpret the story in a manner understood within her Western culture; however, she was surprised to see that they interpreted it in relation to their African cultural context. They interpreted, for instance, that the ghost in the story was a witch's omen in accordance with their beliefs, and Hamlet was driven by that cultural belief to avenge Claudius' murder. The aforementioned instance from the article highlights that the interpretation of stories is shaped by the sociocultural contexts of the audience.

In Pakistan, according to Sharif (2017), like other countries around the globe, Shakespearean plays are reinterpreted, which offers completely new angles to the audience in the country. Pakistani audience interpret his plays in relation to their specific cultural conditions. The plays of Shakespeare are recontextualized in the cultural context of the country to address pressing social challenges in contemporary Pakistan. These appropriations and transformations of his plays highlight Shakespeare lasting presence and influence within the literary and cultural discourse of Pakistan.

According to Buckley (2014), Shakespeare's Taming of the Shrew was adapted as Illaj-e-Zid Dasteyab Hai at the Globe Theatre, London, in 2012. The adaptation was not only staged in Urdu, but the entire storyline presents patriarchal structures in Pakistani society (Sharif, 2017). The play, Othello by Shakespeare, was adapted by Zia Mohyeddin and performed at NAPA (National Academy of Performing Arts) in Karachi in 2009 (Khan et al., 2022). The adaptation focuses on themes such as masculine supremacy, jealousy, and honour-related violence, especially the killing of wives by their life partners. Another TV play, Humsafar, a Pakistani version of Othello, was telecast from September 24th 2011, to March 3rd 2012 (Tejani, 2011). This play also revolves around critical issues in Pakistan, such as masculine supremacy, spousal relationships, and the conspiracies of others to spoil the marriage institution by making a husband suspicious of his wife. Likewise, the famous Pukhto romance, according to Heston and Nasir (1989), Sher Alam-Memunai, is also considered a Pukhto version of Othello. This Pukhto romance, actually happened in the present-day Bajaur, depicts infidelity, suspicions (Farid & Dinakhel, 2023); however, the overriding theme is honour-based violence, which still runs deep in the Pukhtun culture.

In their study, Khan et al. (2022) explore that in Pakistan, honour killing incidents are taking place regularly because the killers often enjoy social immunity. They assert that commonly, an act of honour killing is not reported, as the family often brushes it under the carpet and usually disguises it as a suicide murder. Even if reported, the male-dominated judicial system generally fails to bring the killers to justice. While referring to data from Aurat Foundation reports, the researchers assert that approximately 280 cases of honour-based killings were reported from October 2016 to the month of June 2017 to the police, where only 7 killers were imprisoned (Khan, et al,. 2022). In 2021, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [HRCP], 470 honour killing incidents took place. In 2022, as many as 318 cases were reported to the concerned departments. From 2018 to 2022, according to Ousat (2023), among 2537 honour killing

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victims in Pakistan, the majority of them were female, as 1679 women were killed for the sake of restoring honour.

Linda Hutcheon's A Theory of Adaptation (2006) conceptualises adaptation not just as secondary or derivative, but as a process of creative reinterpretation. According to Hutcheon, "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication." (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 7). The adapter works in one socio-cultural context; however, the interpretation established within that frame of reference can change over time. As Hutcheon exemplifies it that the feminist authors introduced themes, which were silenced in men's works: physical and sexual violence. Hutcheon accounts for various possible purposes behind doing adaptation: "the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 7).

In adaptation, the context of creation and the context of reception are equally important. All the events or popular images shape our perceptions and interpretation, just as they influence the adapter. According to Hutcheon, "There is a kind of dialogue between the society in which the works, both the adapted text and adaptation, are produced and that in which they are received, and both are in dialogue with the works themselves." (Hutcheon, 2006, P. 149). She elucidates about indeginisation that adapting across cultures is not mere translation of the source text. Experiencing an adaptation, for an audience, in any media or mode of engagement, sociocultural meaning has to be conveyed and transformed within the new environment. Hutcheon further adds that in the transformation of a story from a telling mode into performance, "differences of philosophy, religion, national culture, gender, or race can create gaps that need filling by dramaturgical considerations that are as likely to be kinetic and physical as linguistic." (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 150). According to the theorist, adaptations also sets up transformations of source texts in new socio-cultural settings. Indigenous specificities become relocated to new ground, which results in something hybrid and new (Hutcheon, 2006).

3. Theoretical Framework

This research paper primarily relies on Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation (2006), especially her concept of indigenisation as an act of adaptation, where "local particularities become transplanted to new ground, and something new and hybrid results" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 150). This theoretical framework enables the analysis of Fasana-e-Ajaib not merely as a derivative or secondary work but as a creative reconceptualisation that critically engages with Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale and its Pakistani version. Hutcheon's theory, as a conceptual foundation, accounts for various adaptations such as film, stage performance, literature, and digital media, making this analytical approach suitable for the current study.

4. Methodology

This comparative study is essentially qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive in nature. The close reading technique is employed for data collection. Catherine Belsey's (2013) model is used to interpret the deep-seated messages within the selected texts. The process of primary data collection began with sourcing authentic texts for both the source play and its Pakistani adaptation. The Winter's Tale by William Shakespeare, 2009 edition, edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, was thoroughly studied. The Urdu script for Fasana-e-Ajaib was obtained from the National Academy of Performing Arts, which serves as the text for the Pakistani adaptation. While using intensive reading techniques, random extracts were selected to identify recurring themes and motifs such as patriarchy and honour-related violence in both texts. Catherine Belsey's textual analysis model (2013) was used as an analytical technique to examine how the social issues highlighted in the source text are reinterpreted in its Pakistani Winter's Tale.

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While carefully applying Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation (2006), procedures for data analysis involved: identifying key themes such as patriarchy and honour-based violence in both texts, drawing thematic parallels to highlight similarities and differences between the source text and its adaptation. The next stage entailed a detailed examination of how the Pakistani adaptation localised themes from the source to address urgent social issues in the country. In the final phase, findings from this analysis were presented, forming the basis for the discussion and conclusion of this study, and emphasising the key research objectives. Additionally, since the study is qualitative, evidence-based subjective views were incorporated and logically presented.

5. Comparative Analysis of Honour

Honour-based conflict in The Winter's Tale begins when Leontes suspects Hermione of having an inappropriate relationship with his friend, Polixenes. Leontes uses the word 'honour' for the first time in the play when he says, "To see alike mine honour as their profits" (Act 1 Scene 2, Line 357). The term 'honour' precedes the word 'profits', emphasising the significance of the former. Putting the word 'honour' before the term 'benefits' in this line underscores its value above all other possessions. According to David A. DeSilva, "Those who put pleasures ahead of honour were considered to be more animal than human, ruled by their passions and desires" (DeSilva, 2000, p. 12).

The word 'honour' appears for the second time where it is used before the word 'loved' when Camillo says, "So sovereignly being honourable / I have loved thee" (1.2.371-372). For the third time, it is used before the word, 'none' when Camillo states, "I'll give no blemish to her honour, none" (1.2.392). Leontes first wants to kill Polixenes and intends to protect the Queen out of his political necessity. The protagonist is obsessed with honour because he knows that the wife of a king is often supposed to be his political partner. Leontes' selection of words highlights the importance of the concept of honour in an honour-based culture like that of Sicilia. Additionally, this early use of the word 'honour' in the source text is an intentional choice to prepare the ground for an honour-based action in the play. Leontes' sense of honour awakens when he gets suspicious about his wife's relationship with Polixenes. He articulates his distress when he says, "How I am galled – mightst bespica a cup / To give mine enemy a lasting wink / Which draught to me were cordial" (1.2.363-365). The use of the word 'galled' highlights his sense of honour, as he feels it has been harmed by his friend's and wife's romantic relationship.

The use of the first-person singular possessive pronouns before the words 'honour' and 'enemy' at the very beginning of the plot underscores the significance of these terms, which highlights the concept of honour in the play. The frequent use of the term 'honour' shows that the protagonist is obsessed with the concept of honour, which drives him to take violent actions like killing Polixenes, throwing his wife into jail, charging the Queen with infidelity in court, and abandoning Perdita, his newborn daughter, in a deserted place. All these actions are triggered by the King's concept of honour, which he believes has been compromised. Leontes' belief prompts him into violent actions, which sets the tragic trajectory of the source text.

In Act 1, Scene 2, when Leontes' suspicions are at their peak, he uses forty-four interrogative structures in his dialogue, extending the honour-based action in the play. These interrogative structures show his uncertainty about his suspicions, which ultimately avoids the killing of Polixenes and Hermione in the play. This is his uncertainty about his own suspicions that Hermione is imprisoned, brought to court, and Delphie's guidance is sought into the matter; otherwise, it is not a difficult job for a tyrant to punish a wrongdoer. Shakespeare has deliberately created this uncertainty through his frequent use of interrogative structures in the play. Although Leontes is seemingly adamant about punishing those who have disgraced

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Volume 5, Issue 8 October, 2026

him, he does not question the act of honour killing itself. However, it is evident from the speeches of the protagonist and other characters in the play who ask questions repeatedly, which ultimately leads to questioning the practice of honour killing. Shakespeare, through these interrogative structures, puts the practice of honour killing into question, hence rejects it within the play.

The term 'honour' in all its manifestations appears seventy-six times in the Pakistani adaptation, Fasana-e-Ajaib. Its frequency in the adaptation further emphasises Shakespeare's deliberate choice and the significance of the concept of honour in the play. This frequent use in the source text has likely attracted the adapter, Gregory Thompson's attention, to utilise it for addressing honour-related issues in Pakistani culture.

The comparative analysis of the term 'honour' in both the source text and its adaptation highlights that it appears forty-four times in the original work and seventy-six times in its Pakistani adaptation. This increase of thirty-two utterances in the adaptation emphasises the importance of the concept of honour in Pakistani culture. This frequency in the number of occurrences highlights that the adapter emphasised the significance of Shakespeare's intentional use of the word 'honour', thereby stressing its importance, even more evident in understanding the Pakistani version as essentially based on honour-related issues.

Like the source text, in the adaptation, the words which mean 'honour' or, 'dishonour' and 'disgrace' have been used in the possessive forms, which highlights the value of honour in the honour-based culture of Pakistan. For instance, when King Polixenes laments about his condition and says, "Shaid may yahan apni woqaat khota ja raha hon" which is translated as 'Perhaps I am losing my dignity [honour] here] (1.2.10.10). The protagonist also uses it similar fashion when he says, "Es ke ghairat bhi kamal hai" meaning 'Her [Hermione] sense of honour is exceptional' (2.3.19.6). Hermione too is using it in possessive form like, "apni hurmat" [my honour] (3.2.26.3). In the same manner, Florizel states emphatically, "Meri ezzat meri chahat se barh kar hay" (4.4.39.10), meaning 'I prefer my honour over my life'. Similarly, even a minor character such as Autoclycus uses it like other major characters when he expresses his wish, "Agar mera past daghdar na hota tu aaj muashray main meri bari izzat hoti" (5.2.59.4), which is translated as 'Had my past not been tainted, I would have great honour in society today.' This possessive use of the term 'honour' signifies that honour is closely tied to one's sense of self-worth, which makes the audience realise the obsession of individuals with the idea of honour in an honour-conscious culture. These instances from the text of Fasana-e-Ajaib reveal that honour is highly valued, and its protection is ensured at all costs in Pakistani culture.

6. Discussion

The analysis of both the source text and its adaptation emphasises the thematic importance of honour and its crucial role in shaping the tragic paths of both works. It shows that the early introduction, frequent use, and possession form of honour, along with the repeated interrogative structures in the protagonist's speeches, help to understand the honour-killing ethos both within and beyond the works.

The importance of honour as the central theme in The Winter's Tale by Shakespeare aligns with studies highlighting the playwright's skill in establishing the main conflict early in his plays. Scholars like Greenblatt (2012) have explored how Shakespeare introduces his main thematic concerns from the beginning of his plays, enabling the audience to reflect on the emotional, psychological, and moral dilemmas that develop later. Similarly, in Fasana-e-Ajaib, the concept of honour is presented in the very first act; however, there is a stronger focus on how often the idea appears, which further emphasises the value of honour within the cultural context of Pakistan. This analysis also resonates with adaptation theories such as

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Volume 5, Issue 8 October, 2026

Hutcheon's (2006), where the theorist argues that adaptations are rooted in the cultural and ideological backgrounds of the target audience.

The frequent occurrences of the term 'honour' in The Winter's Tale have been extensively explored in Shakespearean studies. Berger (1989) asserts that Shakespeare has emphasised themes like honour and dignity, which serve to express the emotional and psychological obsessions of his characters. In the current study, the protagonist is preoccupied with his concept of honour, and due to his obsession with honour, he takes violent actions to protect it. In Fasana-e-Ajaib, like the source text, the theme of honour emerges as central to the plot; however, the occurrences of the terms meaning dignity, honour, disgrace, or dishonour suggest the value of honour in the cultural settings of Pakistan. This analysis resonates with the theorists of adaptation studies, such as Sander's (2015) contentions. Fasana-e-Ajaib retains the same focus on honour as in the source text, while restructuring it with increased frequency, which highlights its significance in the honour-based culture of Pakistan.

Shakespeare's use of the word 'honour' foreshadows honour as something essentially personal. Using it in possessive forms underscores the individual possession of honour like property, which is consistent with Cairns (2011) arguments that the concept of honour is generally tied to a person's identity and social reputation. Keeping the sociocultural environment of Pakistan, Fasana-e-Ajaib retains the same possessive use of honour like the source text. In Pakistani culture, honour os deemed as a highly valued asset, and it is protected without any compromise.

Men, particularly women, are honour-conscious in Pakistan. A woman knows that she is considered the repository of the family's honour by her male relatives. Therefore, she often surrenders everything, including her life, but she would not compromise her honour. This notion, which considers honour as a family's possession, usually leads to violent effects like honour killing in Pakistan. This analysis aligns with studies such as those carried out by Bond (2012), which explored how viewing honour as a personal possession can cause negative social consequences such as honour killing. By framing honour as personal property, both the source text and its adaptation compel the audience to consider the lethal consequences of treating honour as a material possession that can be gained or lost.

7. Conclusion

As Gregory Thompson, the adapter of The Pakistani Winter's Tale, states, theatre catalyzes revolution; the recontextualisation of Shakespearean plays like The Winter's Tale into Fasana-e-Ajaib contributes to combating violence in Pakistan. The current study emphatically states that adapting The Winter's Tale, in this instance, for theatrical performance serves as a positive force for addressing critical social problems like honour killing in 21st-century Pakistan. In this instance, adapting The Winter's Tale for theatrical performance serves as a positive force for addressing critical social problems like honour killing in present-day Pakistan. Therefore, it can be concluded that Fasana-e-Ajaib shares compelling similarities with Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale and demonstrates considerable potential to engage with serious social issues in modern-day Pakistan. Accordingly, Fasana-e-Ajaib may serve as an effective educational tool for addressing the subject under discussion.

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Volume 5, Issue 8 October, 2026

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Volume 5, Issue 8 October, 2026

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